CLAIMS

We Claim:

1.   A computer system, comprising:
    -    one or more directories accessible by said computer, said one or more directories comprising a plurality of directory objects, each object having object attributes and data;
    -    a directory shell referencing said one or more directories;
    -    one or more categories in said directory shell, each of said categories being associated with one or more directory objects and at least a portion of the associated object attributes;
    -    a user interface operable for a user to query the categories in the directory shell; and
    -    a directory interface operable to send a search request to the one or more directories in accordance with the query, and receive data from the one or more directories that satisfies the search request.

2.   The computer system of claim 1, wherein at least one of the directories are LDAP compliant.

3.   The computer system of claim 1, further comprising one or more directory drivers each comprising schema data for one or more of said directories.

4.   The computer system of claim 1, wherein said one or more directories are managed on a plurality of servers in communication with a computer onto which the directory shell is loaded.

5.   The computer system of claim 1, wherein the user interface is formatted in HTML.

6.   The computer system of claim 1, further comprising an administrator utility to configure the categories and the user interface.

7.   A method in a computer system, comprising the steps of:

-    creating a directory shell comprising one or more categories;

-    associating said directory shell with one or more directories, wherein each directory comprises a plurality of directory objects having object attributes and attribute data;

-    associating each of said categories with one or more directory objects and at least a portion of the object attributes corresponding to the directory objects;

-    requesting a search for query data against a selected category;

-    searching the one or more directories for the query data against the attribute data corresponding to the directory objects and object attributes associated with the selected category;

-    receiving attribute data satisfying the search; and

-    presenting the received attribute data.

8.   The method of claim 7, wherein the step of associating categories further comprise mapping category attributes with object attributes.

9.   The method of claim 7, wherein the step of requesting a search comprises formatting a Boolean search.

10.   The method of claim 7, wherein the steps are performed sequentially as listed.

11.   A computer readable medium comprising a plurality of computer instructions for performing the method of claim 7.

12.   A propagated signal comprising a plurality of computer instructions for performing the method of claim 7.

13.   A data structure, comprising:

-    one or more directories, each directory comprising a plurality of classes with attributes and a plurality of objects instantiated from said classes,

wherein said objects comprise a plurality data associated with the attributes;

- a directory shell associated with said one or more directories;

- a plurality of categories associated with said directory shell, wherein each category corresponds to one or more classes in the one or more directories;

- a plurality of category attributes associated with each category, wherein each category attribute corresponds to an attribute of the class corresponding to the associated category; and

wherein the directory shell is querable against the categories to search and retrieve data of the objects in the one or more directories.

14. The data structure of claim 13, wherein at least one of the one or more directories is a distributed directory.

15. The data structure of claim 13, wherein at least one of the one or more directories is LDAP compliant.

16. The data structure of claim 13, wherein at least one of the one or more directories is a hierarchical directory.

17. The data structure of claim 13, wherein the categories and category attributes are objected oriented programming classes.

18. The data structure of claim 1, wherein the category class is an ObjectScheme Java class and the category attribute class is an AttributeScheme Java class.

19. The data structure of claim 13, wherein the directory shell further comprises one or more directory references each associated with at least one of the one or more directories.

20. The data structure of claim 19, wherein the one or more directory references each have a unique set of associated categories.